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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000663

SIPDIS

AF FOR DAS T. WOODS  
AF/S FOR B. NEULING  
OVP FOR NULAND  
NSC FOR DNSA ABRAMS, SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/09/2015  
TAGS: KPAQ PGOV PREL ZI  
SUBJECT: MEDIA REPRESSION CONTINUES UNDER NEW INFORMATION  
MINISTER

Classified By: AMBASSADOR CHRISTOPHER W. DELL UNDER SECTION 1.4 b/d

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Summary  
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¶1. (SBU) Following his appointment in mid-April, new Minister of Information and Publicity Jokonya has made public overtures to local journalists. However, Jokonya has also reiterated his commitment to the existing repressive media laws and Government intimidation of journalists has continued unabated. In addition, the state-appointed Media Information Commission (MIC) has been slow to make a determination as to whether it will grant an operating license to the Daily News, which has been banned from publishing since 2003.

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Projecting A Softer Edge  
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¶2. (SBU) A ruling-party stalwart with more than two decades of public service, Jokonya's credentials include serving as Zimbabwe's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador to Ethiopia, and most recently as Chief Executive Officer of the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority. Since his appointment, Jokonya has issued statements promising a less restrictive environment for journalists, under the condition that they do not "malign" President Robert Mugabe.

¶3. (SBU) In an effort to normalize relationships with local journalists, Jokonya hosted a meeting on 22 April for senior editors from state and private media during which, according to press reports, he indicated that while the GOZ did not intend to repeal the restrictive Access to Information and Privacy Act (AIPPA), he was open to debating the law and would consider supporting some amendments to the law. Jokonya further indicated that the Government would enforce the law less ruthlessly in the future and would also be more amenable to foreign reporters.

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Actions Speak Louder Than Words  
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¶4. (SBU) Despite Jokonya's public statements, arrests and intimidation have continued. On 21 April, police arrested two journalists from the independent Standard weekly newspaper for "abusing journalistic privileges." The two journalists had reported that during the parliamentary election missing ballot boxes had been located at the home of a senior ZANU-PF official. While the GOZ does not dispute the content of the article - the accused official has appeared in court over the matter - it accused the two journalists of publishing the story with the intention of inciting public violence.

¶5. The April 28th edition of The Daily Mirror ran an article implicating the Deputy Minister of Science and Technology Patrick Zhuwawo, President Mugabe's nephew, in the seizure of a farm in Mashonaland West. The journalist who wrote the article reported in it that during his investigation he was threatened by relatives of Zhuwawo, including President Mugabe's sister. On 30 April, journalists at the Daily Mirror reported receiving death threats from another ZANU-PF insider, William Zvinavashe, the nephew of retired former Chief of Staff General Vitalis Zvinavashe, after publishing a story about Zvinavashe's arrest for his alleged role in hijacking a vehicle.

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Daily News Remains In Limbo  
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¶6. (C) The MIC has repeatedly delayed making a decision on the case of the Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (ANZ), publishers of the Daily News. After the MIC refused the ANZ's application to register for a license, Zimbabwe's Supreme Court set the MIC's decision aside in early March and ordered the ANZ to resubmit an application for registration, requiring the MIC to deliver a decision on the

application no later than 14 May. The MIC was originally scheduled to meet with the ANZ to discuss their application on 29 April, but the MIC cancelled the meeting at the last minute, and rescheduled the meeting for 5 May. At the 5 May meeting, the Executive Chairman of the MIC demanded that the ANZ provide a market analysis, financial projections, a bank statement, and share holder particulars. ANZ CEO Sam Nkomo told the Embassy that the requests were simply another stalling tactic by the MIC.

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Comment  
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¶7. (C) Continued arrests and intimidation dash hopes that Zimbabwe's repressive media environment will ease in the wake of the elections and Jokonya's modest outreach has done little to bolster the confidence of local journalists. That said, newspapers, particularly The Daily Mirror, which is controlled by ZANU-PF interests, and the independent weeklies Standard and Independent, continue to deliver hard-hitting stories that highlight government corruption and criticize the government's policies. In the long-run, the MIC's decision on the Daily News is likely to be the best indicator of the Government's intentions toward press freedom.

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